

# *Spirituality & Community*

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*www.spiritualityandcommunity.com*

**Jarvis the Duck**  
The Series      The Comic Strip  
Kurt Venables



**The Dalai Lama**  
**On the Recent Events in Tibet**

**Coexistence**  
Hrvoje Butkovic

**Inspirational Art**  
Saleire

**The Purple Crocus**  
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# Who We Are

[www.spiritualityandcommunity.com](http://www.spiritualityandcommunity.com)

***Welcome!*** Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

## A New Age of Light

***Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.*** We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

***We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light.*** We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



## What We Do

*Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas.* We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

# **The Dalai Lama**

## **On the Recent Events in Tibet**

April 24, 2008

Today I would like to make a personal appeal to all Chinese spiritual brothers and sisters, both inside as well as outside the People's Republic of China, and especially to the followers of the Buddha. I do this as a Buddhist monk and a student of our most revered teacher, the Buddha. I have already made an appeal to the general Chinese community. Here I am appealing to you, my spiritual brothers and sisters, on an urgent humanitarian matter.



**Potala Palace**

The Chinese and the Tibetan people share common spiritual heritage in Mahayana Buddhism. We worship the Buddha of Compassion – Guan Yin in the Chinese tradition and Chenrezig in Tibetan tradition – and cherish compassion for all suffering beings as one of the highest spiritual ideals. Furthermore, since Buddhism flourished in China before it came to Tibet from India, I have always viewed the Chinese Buddhists with the reverence due to senior spiritual brothers and sisters.

As most of you are aware, beginning with the 10th of March this year, a series of demonstrations have taken place in Lhasa and across many Tibetan areas. These are caused by deep Tibetan resentment against the policies of the Chinese government. I have been deeply saddened by the loss of life, both Chinese and Tibetans, and immediately appealed to both the Chinese authorities and the Tibetans for restraint. I specially appealed to the Tibetans not to resort to violence.

Unfortunately, the Chinese authorities have resorted to brutal methods to deal with the development despite appeals for restraint by many world leaders, NGOs and noted world citizens, particularly many Chinese scholars. In the process, there has been loss of life, injuries to many, and the detention of large number of Tibetans. The crackdown still continues, especially targeting monastic institutions, which have traditionally been the repository of ancient Buddhist knowledge and tradition. Many of these have been sealed off. We have reports that many of those detained are beaten and treated harshly. These repressive measures seem to be part of an officially sanctioned systematic policy.

With no international observers, journalists or even tourists allowed to Tibet, I am deeply worried about the fate of the Tibetans. Many of those injured in the crackdown, especially in the remote areas, are too terrified to seek medical treatment for fear of arrest. According to some reliable sources, people are fleeing to the mountains where they have no access to food and shelter. Those who remained behind are living in a constant state of fear of being the next to be arrested.

I am deeply pained by this ongoing suffering. I am very worried where all these tragic developments might lead to ultimately. I do not believe that repressive measures can achieve any long-term solution. The best way forward is to resolve the issues between the Tibetans and the Chinese leadership through dialogue, as I have been advocating for a long time. I have repeatedly assured the leadership of the People's Republic of China that I am not seeking independence. What I am seeking is a meaningful autonomy for the Tibetan people that would ensure the long-term survival of our Buddhist culture, our language and our distinct identity as a people. The rich Tibetan Buddhist culture is part of the larger cultural heritage of the People's Republic of China and has the potential to benefit our Chinese brothers and sisters.

In the light of the present crisis, I appeal to all of you to help call for an immediate end to the ongoing brutal crackdown, for the release of all who have been detained, and to call for providing immediate medical care to the injured.

For more, see: [www.dalailama.com/page.70.htm](http://www.dalailama.com/page.70.htm)

# Jarvis the Duck

Kurt Venables

## The Omen

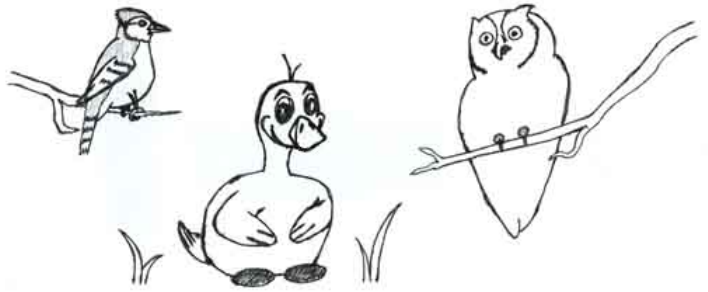
*Jarvis is a young duck that lives on a small pond in The Great Poplar Forest. These are the chronicles of his adventures.*

The party continued to fly due north. The Harpy patrols, however, had become increasingly numerous. Talon was at a loss to explain the Harpies' strong presence in this part of The Black Forest. He told the party that the Harpies' domain had always been to the west, with their capital at The Cliffs of Valhalla, and that the Falcon's domain lies to the east. He explained that the Harpies and the Falcons were natural enemies and that this land had always been a neutral zone. The friends discussed possible alternative routes but decided to continue due north to try to reach the Snowy Owls as quickly as possible. A detour to the east through the falcon territory near Heliopolis would be very time consuming. The party did decide to begin traveling at night. Sage, with his excellent night vision, was particularly helpful in guiding them. It was now late November, and the party had been traveling at night for several days. Dawn was beginning to break, and the group was just bedding down in the canopy near a large river after bowing to Ra.

"Dudes, I am so ready for sleep," said Jay.

"I didn't think you ever got tired, Jay," replied Jarvis good naturedly, "We'll have to write this date down."

"I can't get used to this night flying," said Jay.



"Man, night flying's a lot better than being dismembered by a Harpy patrol," said Sage with a smile, "I actually find it refreshing."

"Yeah, I guess I agree, Sage; I'm not really up for a dismemberment at the moment," replied Jay with his usual good natured sarcasm.

"OK, guys, less banter and more sleep," said Jarvis with a smile.

Suddenly, a huge object, traveling very quickly, fell from the sky and landed in the river with a loud splash. The friends looked up in the dim light to see the huge shadowed figures of two Harpies flying away to the north.

"I think that was a bird," said Jarvis excitedly. "We'd better have a look." He jumped from the canopy, glided down to the water, and then dove down. A second later he popped up, "Angel, give me a hand, there is a bird down here."

Angeldown was already gliding down. Together, they pulled a Harpy from the river, struggling to break through the ice that had formed all along its banks.

"Holy crap," said Jay, "This guy's a monster," and then again, "Holy crap!"

The bird was huge, even by Harpy standards, and its wings and feet were bound with strong twine. It was barely conscious, but as it coughed up water it was clear he would be OK. Talon kept his distance, warily eyeing the Harpy.

“I don’t know if we should have saved this one,” said Talon warily.

“We couldn’t let him drown,” replied Angeldown firmly.

Sage sliced through the twine with his sharp beak, and after a few moments, the Harpy became more lucid.

“Where ... am I,” managed the Harpy with a deep, raspy voice.

“I don’t know exactly where we are,” said Jarvis, “as we are travelers, but we just pulled you out of that river. ... I’m Jarvis.”

The Harpy looked around at the party, pausing his eye briefly on Talon. He was standing now, and towered above the friends. Yet, he seemed calm. “Jarvis the duck, I am Thor. You pay me great respect ... You saved my life.” He nodded to Jarvis and then to Angeldown. “My general, Red Claw, ... my ex-general, I assure you, ... they bound me in my sleep. ... They tried

to kill me!” said Thor, half to the party and half to himself.

“Why?” asked Jarvis innocently.

“You see, ... I am the king of the Harpies.”

Talon winced, shocked, yet remained composed. The others were at a loss of what to make of Thor. “I must return. My clan and I will make those responsible for this pay dearly. ... Yet I have been saved by ducks, ducks traveling with a falcon. I do not know what this means. Perhaps, I have been wrong. Perhaps, this is an omen.”

The friends were mainly frozen and replied with silence. Thor took off and flew north. As he left, he bellowed in a deep voice that had regained its strength, “There is a gorge just north of here. Stay away from there or you may be killed. You should leave this place. You are in great danger.”

After Thor had gone, the friends stood in silence. After a while, Talon said in a low voice, “I do not like the sound of any of that.”

# Jarvis the Duck

## The Comic Strip

### Kurt Venables

Humility is key to happiness.



The Light cannot shine in a heart that lacks humility.



My problem is: It's hard to be humble when you're a great flyer.



# Spiritual Art Saleire



**Guardian of Sacred Knowledge**



**Once in a Blue Moon- An Angel is Born**



**Bird of Prey**

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For more, see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/saleire/sets/72157603780088386/>

# My Purple Crocus

Vicky Pinpin-Feinstein

When I decided to take meditation seriously years ago, it seemed meditation would not take me seriously. Looking for a way to balance modern life's demands —marriage, family, career— became even more pressing when I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. I joined a meditation group, worked with a teacher to polish techniques, read books, and began a daily practice. Months passed, I practiced—breathing and being “in the moment,” as my teacher, Jennie, invoked again and again. Instead of the promised tranquility, I felt frustration. I was, for lack of a better word, meditation-challenged. Why didn't I get it? Perhaps I didn't understand what being in the moment meant. I was ready to quit and take my next self-help elixir.

But one morning, bracing myself for a hectic day, I rushed out of the house. My mind was already at top speed thinking of all the things I needed to do. I had just closed the door behind me and stepped down the stairs of the front porch to the flag-stoned walkway leading to the garage. And there I saw, planted on the wet and muddy ground, undaunted by the soggy spring, a very tiny crocus flower.

I could have missed it, or worse, trampled it underfoot since it was perched perilously close to the flagstones. It was certainly not the most beautiful flower I'd ever seen. But something made me stop.

“Take the time. Look at me,” it commanded. Without further prodding, my eyes feasted on its rich purple petals speckled with white and even darker purple veins. Gazing at its bold yellow stamen designed to attract and to tease, I knelt on the ground to smell its fragrance. The little flower came alive, even proud, as I touched it lightly. Engrossed with this tiny spectacle, my senses awakened. I experienced a kind of contentment like never before. For what seemed like eternity although it was but a few minutes, I became aware of the moment, transformed into the sentient being that Jennie had gently beseeched me to try to become.

A bird shrieked loudly in the distance and jolted me back to the yard. But the feeling of contentment remained with me for much of the day. For once, I did not need to hurry. These days when my wheels are spinning hastily, I visualize my special crocus and listen for its instructions on achieving tranquility, even if it's just for the moment.

# What Price Coexistence?

Hrvoje Butkovic

What does it take for us to live peacefully and in harmony with each other? This is an ancient question. It is at least as relevant today as it has been throughout history. It is no easy matter to resolve. After all, one man's most dearly held truth is another's blasphemy. There are radical disagreements on what the purpose of human life should be, and consequently, on how to live it.

People's beliefs are shaped by myriad religions, philosophies and schools of thought. They don't speak with a unitary voice, but have their teachings and insights interpreted in a multitude of ways by numerous sects and individuals that comprise them. Considering the importance of life's big questions and the number of ways in which they can be answered, peaceful coexistence is a formidable challenge.

A solution that has found widespread application throughout history and still enjoys strong following is to ensure that other people see the world the way we do. We require them to base their views on the same evidence, interpret that evidence the same way, and reach the same conclusions. The appeal of this approach is obvious - people will generally find it easier to coexist if they agree on what the purpose of life is and how it should be lived.

Even though attempting to convert other people to one's own viewpoint is an indispensable tool of the power-hungry, it is not inherently about the pursuit of power. At its heart, it is about believing our views to be correct, recognising the benefits that they have brought us, and wishing for other people to share in them. There is nothing sinister about this; in fact, it is an act of kindness.

This point was forcibly driven home for me through participation in various Internet-based discussion forums. One of them has a membership that primarily consists of atheists. This is about as far removed from religious doctrine as one can get. Nevertheless, many of these people were quite persistent at trying to convince the religious members of the forum to abandon their theistic inclinations as if these were nothing more than harmful superstitions. What I found even more surprising was that it generally didn't matter what the beliefs in question were or how well they were utilised by the persons holding them; all deviations from naturalism and/or materialism were deemed unwelcome and potentially harmful.

A closer look at these people has helped me understand how those who vocally denounce all religious dogma can nevertheless act as if they were trying to promote one. The most outspoken of them were raised in a religious environment; some have carried their indoctrination into adulthood. Sooner or later they became aware of shortcomings. They may have found that the certainty of their convictions was not warranted by the evidence on which they were based. They may have been endowed with an enquiring mind, and their views could not withstand the endless barrage of questions. They may also have had moral difficulties with some of their beliefs that clearly gave rise to destructive consequences. Whichever factor triggered the change in

their outlook, other factors typically followed, giving rise to an experience that was both eye-opening and liberating. Little wonder, then, that they wished the same for other people whom they perceived as still suffering from the same erroneous beliefs – to experience the same newly found freedom and see the world with the same newly found clarity.

As well meaning as this approach may be at its core, it nevertheless suffers from a fatal shortcoming – it fails to take into account the fact that we are all unique individuals whose ways of looking at the world are inescapably distinctive. We do not share the same life experience, nor do we interpret it the same way, nor with the same goals. We do not naturally fit the same mould.

An often-touted alternative to conversion is tolerance – allowing each individual to formulate her own way of looking at the world. This approach recognises that we have no right to force our views on other people any more than they have a right to force their views on us. Indeed, any attempt to do so, however well meaning, is likely to be unwelcome. A variant of this approach goes further than merely tolerating other people's views as if they were inferior. It recognises that none of us can lay claim to absolute truth and elevates other people's views to the same exalted status that we accord our own.

Whichever variant of the tolerant position we choose to adopt, a question immediately presents itself – how much disagreement should we tolerate before putting our foot down and insisting that a competing view be discarded? This is a crucial question. It arises because beliefs do not remain in the domain of thought, but invariably sponsor action. It is easy enough to let people think whatever they wish to think. It is not so easy to let them say whatever they want to say. When their actions start hurting other people, it becomes downright impossible.

There are some things we have to agree on if we are to coexist peacefully and harmoniously. Being a perfectly private matter, the choice of the worldview to adopt is not one of them. However, the same cannot be said for the effect that our beliefs have on others. If we are to coexist, we have to agree on which consequences are acceptable and which ones are not. This agreement is necessary by the virtue of the consequences residing in the public domain.

If we were to agree that human life is so precious that we should under no circumstances intentionally and forcefully take the life of another human being, conflicts that currently claim lives on daily basis would cease. If we were to take this a step further and agree that we should likewise not allow human life to end due to omission of action, the life-threatening poverty caused by grossly uneven distribution of wealth would likewise come to an end. It wouldn't matter whether, in doing so, people were trying to follow the dictates of their religion, philosophy, or conscience – the effect would be the same.

If we were to agree that the focus of education should be to teach youngsters how to think rather than what to think, the disputes over whose truth should comprise the curriculum and how much emphasis should be given to competing perspectives would likewise cease. Extending this to upbringing as a whole would diffuse all sorts of

disagreements that are fuelled by our desire to force our beliefs and our values on our offspring.

These examples offer an intriguing insight. They imply that it doesn't matter what other people believe, as long as their behaviour adheres to the commonly accepted norms. It is only when their conduct fails to meet the agreed-upon standard that we are justified in attempting to shift the views that have sponsored it.

Reaching agreement on the acceptable consequences of our beliefs might initially appear straightforward, but this illusion is quickly dispelled as we delve into the detail. If we agree that consenting adults should be free to express their love for each other in whatever manner appears most appropriate to them, then we are not entitled to object to our neighbours' homosexual or polygamous relationships. We might support increased emphasis on critical thinking in the school curricula to help youngsters size up the many dubious ideas that they will undoubtedly be exposed to, yet react with horror if our own beliefs were to receive the same treatment.

As the above examples hopefully demonstrate, it is not so much that we have fundamentally different ideas of what constitutes acceptable consequences, but that we fail to appreciate the extent to which our belief systems are riddled with internal inconsistencies. We may like an idea and think that we support it, only to discover that it conflicts with some of our deepest convictions.

An approach to ironing out inconsistencies that I have found useful is to get in touch with the subject matter of our deeply held beliefs. If we believe that human life should be preserved except in the case of a particular group of people, then we should get to know these people so closely that we are able to see the world the way they do. If we believe that homosexuality and polygamy should not be accorded the same status as heterosexual couple unions, then we should come to know people who harbour these preferences so well that we are able to feel what life would be like for us if we shared them.

What this approach enables us to do is ensure that our convictions do not get in the way of our humanity. This is what I believe is needed for us to reach agreement on the acceptable consequences of our actions. In turn, this is the prerequisite for our ability to coexist without strife.

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For more, see: <http://fluffygroovy.com>.